OVERTURE SPEECH
PRESBYTERY OF CHICAGO
FEBRUARY 13, 1996

MY HOPE IS THAT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WILL FIND A NEW WAY TO TALK ABOUT THIS ISSUE WHICH WILL ALLOW US TO FIND SOME TIME AND SPACE IN WHICH TO CONTINUE TO LEARN AND GROW IN UNDERSTANDING AND IN CHARITY AND LOVE.

THESE OVERTURES -- ELOQUENTLY STATE THE CONFLICT IN THE OLD TERMS, TERMS WE ALL KNOW AND HAVE KNOWN LONG BEFORE THE THREE YEAR STUDY PERIOD.

THEY DO NOT ADD NEW INSIGHT NOR MOVE THE DISCUSSION AHEAD. RATHER THEY PROPOSE A RESOLUTION ON THE OLD TERMS OF ONE SIDE WINS, THE OTHER LOSES.

BOTH CITE SCRIPTURE AND THE TRADITION IN DEFENSE OF THEIR CONCLUSIONS AND PROPOSALS FOR RESOLUTION. AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING ABOUT WHICH I AM SURE, IT IS THAT PRESBYTERIANS OF INTELLIGENCE, GOOD WILL, SCHOLARLY SOPHISTICATION AND SIMPLE FAITH -- DISAGREE ON THIS. AND EACH SIDE CAN LINE UP BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL EXPERTS AND FIRE AWAY LIKE TWO LINES OF FIELD ARTILLERY.

I THINK NO ACTION WOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE RESPONSE.

AND WHATEVER WE DECIDE, MY HOPE IS THAT WE WILL ALL TRY TO FIND A NEW WAY TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE AND HOLD OUR CHURCH TOGETHER.

THEOLOGY OF MISSION

PRESBYTERY OF CHICAGO

Last July our Moderator, Marj Carpenter captured the imagination of the 207th General Assembly with her phrase "Mission Matters." She has been, ever since, a refreshing and very important voice reminding the entire Presbyterian family that while we are arguing with one another about the boundaries of the Reformed Tradition, who will be ordained, and where all the money went, vital mission has been going on - all over the world: the mission of Jesus Christ, carried out by

PRESBYTERIAN MISSION WORKERS, REPRESENTING THE PRESBYTERIAN PEOPLE AND SUPPORTED BY THEIR DOLLARS.

IN FACT MODERATOR CARPENTER'S PERSONAL MISSION HAS BEEN TO REMIND ALL OF US THAT WHEN WE REDUCE OUR SUPPORT FOR PRESBYTERIAN MISSION, THE EFFECT OF THAT REDUCTION IS FELT NOT JUST IN AN OFFICE IN LOUISVILLE, BUT IN A CLINIC IN PAKISTAN, A CHURCH IN GUATEMALA, A THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY IN BANGKOK, OR - A SETTLEMENT HOUSE ON THE WEST SIDE, A CONGREGATION IN THE SUBURBS, A YOUTH PROGRAM IN THE INNER CITY.

MISSION IS WHAT WE ARE ABOUT. WHAT WE ARE FOR AS A CHURCH. THE MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST IS WHAT WE SHARE REGARDLESS

OF OUR THEOLOGICAL OR IDEOLOGICAL POSTURE.

AS WE HAVE LOOKED AT THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROVIDING FOR THE MISSION OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE PROGRAMS OF THE PRESBYTERY OF CHICAGO SOME OF US HAVE BEEN CONCERNED THAT AT THE MOMENT OF GREATEST NEED AND GREATEST OPPORTUNITY WE SEEM TO HAVE LESS AND LESS RESOURCES. WE'RE CONCERNED BECAUSE WHILE PRESBYTERIANS HAVE MORE - AND GIVE MORE THAN EVER, THEY SEEM RELUCTANT TO BE IN MISSION TOGETHER AS A CHURCH - AS A PRESBYTERIAN FAMILY. SOME OF US AREN'T SURE WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, IF WE DO NOT SHARE SOME COMMON DEFINITIONS OF OUR MISSION

AND SOME CONCRETE, PRACTICAL COMMITMENT TO IT.

AND SO WE SUGGESTED, AND THE PRESBYTERY AGREED, THAT OUR FIRST PRIORITY WAS TO TALK TO ONE ANOTHER ABOUT THE THEOLOGY OF MISSION - BEFORE WE TALK ABOUT THE DOLLARS.

OUR SUGGESTION WAS THAT WE LISTEN, AS A PRESBYTERY, OVER AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME, TO PEOPLE WHO ARE INVOLVED IN MISSION AND PEOPLE WHO CARE REFLECT THEOLOGICALLY ON MISSION: THAT WE TALK TO ONE ANOTHER ABOUT WHAT WE ARE HEARING, AND THAT WE LISTEN, VERY CAREFULLY TO ONE ANOTHER. OUR ASSUMPTION IS THAT EACH OF US CARES VERY DEEPLY ABOUT MISSION AND THAT WE HAVE

THINGS TO SAY TO ONE ANOTHER THAT WE NEED TO HEAR.

AND SO THAT IS WHAT WE ARE BEGINNING TONIGHT.

IN GROUPS OF 3 OR 4 PLEASE TALK TO ONE ANOTHER ABOUT TWO QUESTIONS -

1. WHAT THEOLOGICAL/BIBLICAL VALUE SHOULD INFORM THE PRESBYTERY'S THINKING OF MISSION?

AT THE 206TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY THE PHRASE "THEOLOGY MATTERS" GAINED SOME NOTORIETY. THIS IS AN EXERCISE IN THEOLOGY MATTERS; IN DOING THEOLOGY TOGETHER AS A PEOPLE.

WHAT THEOLOGICAL/BIBLICAL VALUE SHOULD INFORM THE PRESBYTERY'S THINKING OF MISSION -

-IS IN GOD'S LOVE

-IS IT JUSTICE OF GOD'S REIGN

-IS IT THE CALL TO GO INTO ALL NATIONS AND BAPTIZE

AND

2. WHAT MISSION COMMITMENTS SHOULD GUIDE THE PRESBYTERY'S FUTURE MINISTRY?

THIS IS STRATEGY - AFTER WE HAVE TALKED ABOUT THE <u>WHY</u>? OF MISSION, WE TURN TO WHERE -

-NEW CHURCH DEVELOPMENTS

-CHURCH REDEVELOPMENTS

-START A SCHOOL

-BUILD A CLINIC

-Begin a street ministry

dream/vision

We hope you will write about these questions and your answers will help us plan the next five Presbytery meetings.

Something important is going on in the world ... something described eloquently by the prophet

"Do not remember the former days,

Behold I am doing a new thing.

Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?"

It's a question of mission theology and mission strategy.

Have fun - talk about _____ minutes.